

**Sharing the fruits
of our prayer and
listening to one
another in our
diocese.**

KILDARE AND LEIGHLIN SYNTHESIS

The Synodal Pathway
of the Catholic Church in Ireland

communion

participation

mission



KANDLE

Alongside the FOREWORD, these pages contain the precise written content of the 10 page diocesan synthesis that was submitted to the Irish Bishops' Conference on May 29th, 2022.

The synthesis reflects the diversity of views and opinions expressed while paying particular attention to the lived experience of participants. It does not seek to summarise or list everything that was said nor is it a policy statement of the diocese or the Bishop. Rather this synthesis aims to share the fruits of what was said by the People of God in Kildare and Leighlin in the synod consultations, revealing our current reality of being Church with an openness to listening to what the Spirit is saying to us through this reality and what dreams God may have for us as we walk together.

This synthesis should be viewed as only a beginning of a longer journey together as we continue to listen to one another and the Holy Spirit who is alive and active in our midst.



Pope Francis sees the synodal mode as the new way of being Church, it's not a destination, an end point, it is the new way of all of us owning our faith, all of us active in our faith community. The Church is forever renewing herself.
- Bishop Denis Nulty



FOREWORD

In October 2021 Bishop Denis Nulty appointed Julie Kavanagh, Jean Roche and Fr Liam Morgan as the diocesan delegates for the Synodal Pathway in Ireland and for the Universal Synod.

In November the delegates formed a Diocesan Synod Committee along with Noeleen Lynam, Gerry Martin, Michelle Ward and Fr David Vard. All of the committee are active in parish life as well as being members of the Diocesan Pastoral Council, the Diocesan Commission for Liturgical Formation and/or K&L Faith Development Services.

The committee was very much dependent on and grateful for the goodwill and partnership with parishes, staff and parishioners across the diocese who made the listening sessions happen locally and

who wrote up and returned submissions. There was also a huge amount of assistance from people involved in focus groups and in schools.

The writing of the Diocesan Synthesis began with a team of 11 people giving prayerful attention to every submission and to the voice of the Holy Spirit coming through what was shared. This group, made up of lay men and women, a religious, priests and a deacon, then met for a day when they were facilitated in discerning the content of the synthesis. Two writers then drafted the synthesis over a number of days. This draft was brought back to the team, to members of the DPC, DCLF and members of the Priests' Council and others - all of whom had been involved in local listening. The synthesis is the fruit of this wide ranging listening in Kildare and Leighlin.

Introduction

The background to our Synod Listening

There was a significant effort made, and time given, to prepare well for the synodal experience in Kildare and Leighlin Diocese. Three delegates, two lay women and a diocesan priest, were appointed by the Bishop. Over time this grew into a synodal committee of seven people. Again, this consisted of a variety of lay and ordained, women and men. As well as focussing on the local, this committee became part of the national conversation and planning for the Diocesan phase of the Synod.

Preparing for the Synod Listening

In Advent 2021 the committee began to promote the synod and its processes to parishes via weekly newsletter items and social media platforms (Twitter and Facebook). A timeline was put in place to prepare deep listening during Lent, under the banner 'Listening Lent.' Time was given to identify key focus groups and partners as well as familiarising parishioners and pastoral staff with the process to be employed. A parish toolkit was prepared that aimed at empowering parish communities and clusters of parishes to hold listening meetings of the local Church in Lent. This toolkit included information on how to hold one two-hour meeting, as well as three one-hour meetings. Both versions were guided by the synod themes of Communion, Participation and Mission. Training was provided over zoom and was very well received by the over 60 people who participated. The feedback was that people felt well prepared to facilitate local meetings.

The questions people were asked

Three groups of questions were formulated and became the basis of the synodal listening. The questions were: Communion – Thinking about the Church and our parish, how and when do I find being part of it a source of joy or nourishment for me in my faith? When might it bring disappointment or pain? Participation – When I hear the word 'Church' who do I think of? Who is missing?

Whom do we need to listen to? How can we be more inclusive? Mission – Thinking about how we as a parish community bring the love of Christ into the world, what one thing does our local parish do really well? What one thing could it do better? What one thing could I do? What specific hope or dream do I have for the Church moving forward?



These questions were replicated in parish gatherings, in an online survey and when meeting focus groups. The model used to explore these questions in listening sessions was one of spiritual conversations.

Of the 56 parishes of the diocese, 34 participated in locally hosted parish gatherings. Some parishes held single parish gatherings. Some clustered together. Others, including beyond the 34 parishes, signposted their people to the online platform for submissions or left out surveys for people to take home. The online survey generated 171 individual and group responses. Significantly, 37% of online respondents were in the 18-29 age group.

Raising awareness about the synod conversations

In order to reach as many people as possible, submissions to the synod were sought and accepted in a variety of ways. A dedicated email address was created to facilitate the return of submissions as well as a dedicated website page which provided information on the synod with links to video inputs and other resources. A local video of invitation to take part in the synod listening was recorded and uploaded on the website and to social media platforms. Posters outlining the synod questions and with a QR code to the online survey were circulated. An article on the synodal process was printed in a local newspaper, 'The Carlow Nationalist'.

Other creative methods were also employed to raise awareness of the synod and to reach as many people as possible. Carlow Institute of Technology held 'intentional coffee' gatherings. Confirmation classes were asked to write to Bishop Denis ahead of the celebration of the sacrament and encouraged to write about synodality. People were able to write directly to the Diocese via the email address. The Synod Prayer was sent to all parishes early on and a good many prayed and continue to pray the prayer at Sunday Masses.

Engaging with Focus Groups

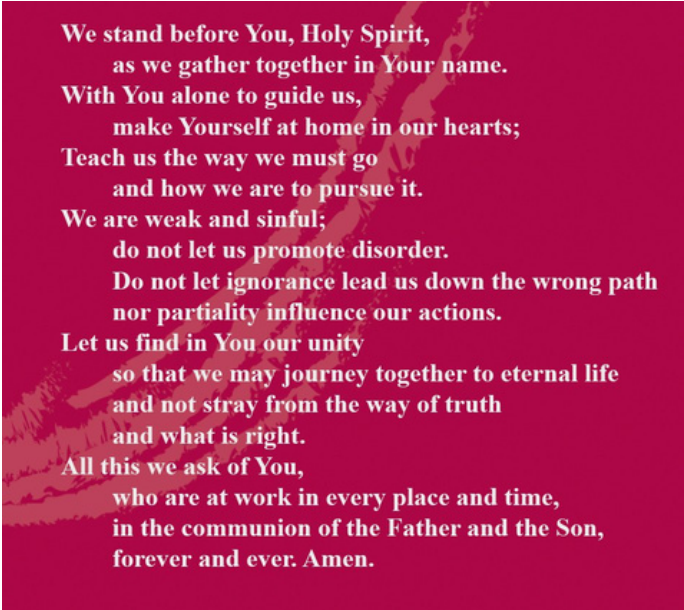
In recognition of the call to go beyond the scope of the voices we are used to hearing, a great effort was made to 'reach to the peripheries'. In particular, a series of focus groups was identified and approached to be part of our synodal listening. The groups identified were the Travelling Community, members of the LGBTQ+ Community, the Prison Community, those in Religious life, Primary (including parents), Secondary and College students, the African Community and the Polish Community. These focus group sessions, some facilitated by Diocesan representatives and some self-facilitated, were rich and the content will be picked up in subsequent sections of this report.

Who participated

While participation in the synodal experience was wide and varied, there were a number of groups of people we experienced as missing and yet to be accompanied in a synodal way. We recognise that, although many clergy did gather with their people in parish listenings, there was no bespoke gathering of clergy. This might have been a rich experience and contributed to the discernment of where the Spirit is leading us. Parents of young children were also invited to participate but have not engaged well as of yet. An effort to do so was made by sending home information and some questions with primary school children, but there was very little response to this initiative.

Overall, we can estimate that over 3,000 people actively engaged with the synod questions. In the context of the total diocesan population, from a sampling perspective, this constitutes a more than adequate response to have confidence in the findings. The number does not include those who were aware of the process but, for whatever reason, did not or could not actively take part. All submissions were formally received by Bishop Denis at the Chrism Mass.

Prayer for the Universal Synod



We stand before You, Holy Spirit,
as we gather together in Your name.
With You alone to guide us,
make Yourself at home in our hearts;
Teach us the way we must go
and how we are to pursue it.
We are weak and sinful;
do not let us promote disorder.
Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path
nor partiality influence our actions.
Let us find in You our unity
so that we may journey together to eternal life
and not stray from the way of truth
and what is right.
All this we ask of You,
who are at work in every place and time,
in the communion of the Father and the Son,
forever and ever. Amen.

The body of our synthesis

The key experiences and themes that emerged

Sharing the joy and the pain, the highs and the lows of journeying together

There was a genuine attempt across the diocese to engage in the synodal experience and those who responded did so seriously and with integrity. Many people reported, with great energy, that it was good to be asked their opinion. Indeed, for many this was the first time they experienced the Church asking their opinion on issues that they hold dear. This of itself is of significance.

There was a richness of experience for those who took part. It was surprising to many that people who hold very different views on the Church were able to speak and listen to each other, with all opinions being expressed. The experience was therefore one of encouragement to keep going and to repeat this way of being together. It felt like a new model of Church emerging; one that requires us to learn the habit of walking together.



The experience released hurt as well as hope. People expressed their pain, hurt and disappointment with the institutional Church, and at the same time they were hopeful because of the hard work and support of their local parish priests and parish teams. In this way, the experience was difficult but full of promise.

It must be noted that there was a degree of cynicism evident among some, including both clergy and lay people. This was around trusting and believing that this process will lead to the real change that we are being called to as Church by the Holy Spirit. Yet, there was a joy expressed at coming together. Each gathering was the Church in action.

Compassion, a spirit of care for the other and a stance of welcome and inclusion was noteworthy across the responses in all forms of participation.

Recurring Themes

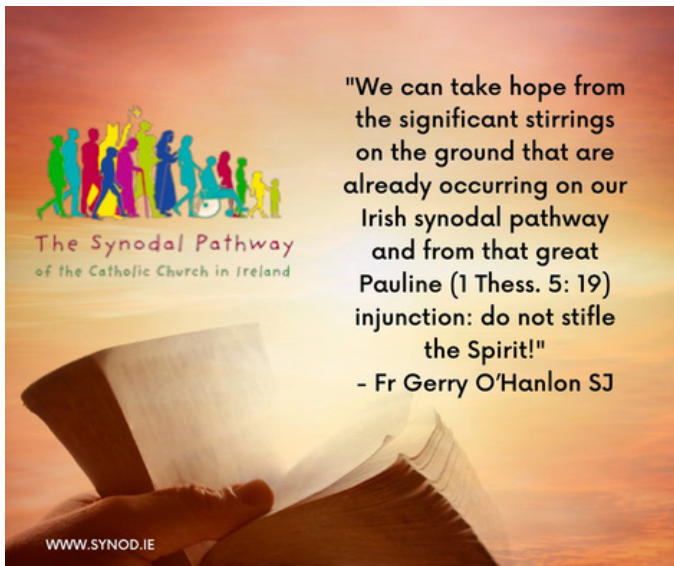
The hurt and distress caused by abuse

A number of issues were spoken of at practically every gathering and in every focus group and were echoed in the online submissions. Those issues were: The hurt and distress caused by the abuse scandals and their legacy. People spoke of their dismay and enduring pain at what happened but also at the way the issue was handled or covered up which constituted a second layer of pain. The capacity of people to trust the institutional Church is still seriously damaged and prevents many people from being able to identify themselves with the institutional Church and sometimes with the local Church.

Sharing governance and leadership locally

A real call to include lay women and men in governance and leadership in the Church, both locally and universally. This necessitates the creation of supporting synodal structures, for example parish pastoral councils. There was a named desire for more meetings such as these listening exercises in order to support a greater walking together locally. Alongside this was a call for training for lay involvement in all aspects of parish life.





The role of women

There was a very strong recognition of the role currently played by women in local church communities. The observation was often made that the voluntary roles in parish life are in the main carried out and led by women. It was also observed that women have 'a special place in the Church but not an equal place'. These comments came through all age groups. It was particularly noticeable among young people who see the treatment of women in the Church as an anomaly in the context of their lived experience.



Ordained leadership

In the context of ordained leadership, the call for women to be ordained as Deacons as well as an end to compulsory celibacy for priests and allowing priests to marry was made by a significant number of submissions. In addition, many references were made to the loss to the Church of priests who have left ministry in order to marry.

LGBTQ+ members in the life of the Church

Drawing on the example of the welcoming and loving ministry of Christ, there was a very loud and intergenerational call to more compassion and inclusion for people of the LGBTQ+ community. Some members of this community themselves spoke of feeling the need to 'leave their own identity at the door of the Church'. A mother of a transgender child said, 'I am always wondering when someone will take issue with it [being transgender] so it can be quite stressful at times.' Others observed that while doctrinal approaches would deny them the Eucharist, it was their anecdotal experience that such approaches do not enjoy widespread adherence within the local Church.

However, in regard to gay partnerships, there is deep hurt that these loving relationships cannot be recognised by the Church. As stated by one gay Catholic man, 'the Holy Spirit moves through my conscious in abject despair that the Church continues to deny those who share the love of God between them the opportunity to invoke the blessing and affirmation of God of their love.'

Hurt in regard to the doctrinal exclusion from Eucharist of people who are separated/divorced and who are in second relationships was also voiced, with an equal call to compassion, love and inclusion.



The voice of the Traveller Community, the Polish and African Community

The call for inclusion came in other submissions and in other ways. For example, the hope to be more fully a part of the faith community was expressed by members of the Travelling Community. While naming the pain resulting in the way LGBTQ+ people and women are treated by the Church, they also named the pain of discrimination on the part of the Church community on the basis of their ethnic identity and culture. They don't see people from their community in active ministry in the Church, for example as parish readers, altar servers etc. They often feel reluctant to put themselves forward for such ministries in the absence of a direct invitation.

There was a strong desire among this community for priests and parishioners to pro-actively learn about Traveller culture. They spoke of their experience of anticipating the judgement of others as they prepared for important religious events in their lives such as First Communion, Weddings, and Funerals. They expressed the hope that the community would celebrate their culture with them and that they would feel more comfortable and included in the Church.

The submissions from the Polish Community and the African Catholic Family group highlighted the importance for them of sharing, growing, and living their faith within a community. While they feel welcome in their local parishes, there is a need to recognise their desire to be able to have opportunities to celebrate, share and form their faith as individual ethnic groups.



Young people in the Church

The absence of young people and the loss of their particular gifts and life experience to the Church was stated repeatedly across all responses. One of our intentional focus groups was senior cycle students.

Over 500 students engaged with the synod questions. Coming through their responses was a great sense of compassion and a desire to be part of a community. Young people themselves named that they have a lot to offer the Church through their gifts, wisdom and skills, and their immersion in contemporary culture. However, for many the Church is perceived as a place of rules and regulations and as a place of judgement. A huge difficulty for them is the lack of peer accompaniment on their faith journey. If and when they come to Church, they see people who are either a lot younger or older but rarely their own age. The language and position of the official Church in relation to the LGBTQ+ community is an obstacle for their participation in the life of their local Church. As is the role and place of women. These represent a stumbling block for many in their relationship with the Church.

In general, the submissions reflected the diversity of cultures, lifestyles and generations within the diocese and called for all to be welcomed and accepted.



Nourishing and deepening people's faith and prayer life

The need for nourishment for people on their faith journeys was evident through the submissions. This includes faith development programmes for young people and adults and programmes or resources that nourish the spiritual life of people. There was recognition of the huge amount of work and time given to sacramental preparation. On the one hand this was a key positive experience for young people looking back at their faith journey. On the other hand, there was an oft-named concern about what happens after the celebration of these sacraments and the participation of children and families in parish life beyond the sacramental moment. There was a variety of opinion as to where the key accompaniment of children preparing for sacraments should happen – in school, parish, or home.

The survey revealed a wide diversity in the ways people like to pray and the spiritualities of people within the diocese. As we continue to journey together this offers a good reminder to us to draw on the rich and varied repertoire of prayer and traditions offered by the Church. We need to recognise that one size does not fit all. For some Eucharistic adoration, May Altars, processions and daily Mass play an important part in nourishing their faith. For others guided prayer, Lectio Divina, being in nature, quiet reflection and meditation are dearly held ways of praying. As a Church who walks together, we need to recognise and respect the variety of styles and forms of prayer from which people draw upon for their own spiritual nourishment.

Also, there was a sense that people needed the Church to help them more with the 'big questions' they face in life.



The teaching and faith development given by the Church must speak to the realities of people's lives and meet them, as was stated 'where they are at and not where Church leaders want them to be'. There was a repeated recognition of the apparent inability of the Church to speak into the circumstances and language of contemporary society. The ability of the Church to speak its message in the context of modern culture and society is both challenging and urgent. This need was voiced by all age cohorts.



Good liturgy and good homilies were spoken of warmly where they are happening. Where they are not, they are desired. And yet the language of the liturgy is sometimes seen as difficult or a barrier to engagement. Given the centrality of the Eucharist in our 'walking together', our synod responses are calling us to a deeper opening up of the word of God and the prayers of the liturgy into the reality of people's lives in a language that is both accessible and meaningful.

Gratitude and appreciation, community and belonging

Gratitude and appreciation came through in many submissions. Frequently mentioned in conversations was the sense of community and belonging found in their parish, and the sense of peace when we are together, as well as the joy of being part of parish ministries. Receiving the Eucharist and attending daily Mass still remains important for some, as does Eucharistic Adoration. There was an encouragement to further promote this. People appreciated the celebration of the seasons of the Church and felt that times like Easter and Christmas are celebrated very well. For some who may not regularly attend Church these remain key times of connection with the local Church community.



People's experience of the ministry and accompaniment of the community

How people are ministered to in times of illness, death and bereavement was strongly and positively commented on. There was particular reference to how well we celebrate funerals. The importance of this moment of prayer to the bereaved is underscored by the residual hurt felt when, on the rare occasion and for whatever reason, the experience of the family at the time of a funeral might be less than hoped for. Overall, the times of illness, tragedy and death were instanced as times when people felt supported and cared for.

Some said that, even though they did not attend Church regularly, they still needed the Church at times and appreciated that it was there for them. This would seem to convey a sense of people's understanding of Church as a community in action as well as a community in prayer. Many people have a sense of gratitude, belonging and appreciation for a faith community that walks with them.

Again, the split between how people viewed the institutional Church (less positively) and how they viewed their local parish (more positively) is worthy of note.

Minding the gap

In reviewing all the submissions across parish meetings, online surveys and focus groups it was noteworthy that while the issues of social justice and care of the earth are central to Catholic teaching these did not feature highly in responses. On the one hand, we know that these are likely to be important issues for people. This is evidenced by people's responses to social appeals and the leadership of young people on climate action. On the other hand, these issues do not appear to be overtly linked to the work and ministry of the Church.



Conclusion

What are we being called to take notice of?

The need to continue to reach out from and to the margins

Looking back on the diocesan phase of the synod it is clear that a lot happened. This was not lip-service to synodality but a genuine attempt to engage in a synodal experience. There was a breadth and depth to the work that was both challenging and rewarding. This is a good foundation upon which to build.

We need to recognise that there were gaps in our engagement with focus groups. Due to COVID we were unable to engage with the local Prison community as intended.

In hindsight we should have held a bespoke meeting with clergy but also with people living with disabilities and their families. There are likely to be other gaps in our identification of focus groups.

Synodality is not an instant reality but requires significant groundwork and preparation as well as on-going review to ensure that we are genuinely attempting to walk with others as an inclusive Church.

In seeking to go out to the 'peripheries' there was a clear emerging understanding by the Synod Committee that the Church itself is on the peripheries – we share that ground with many others. This must have a bearing on our self-understanding and the role we can play in Irish society.

Remembering the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth

The discernment undertaken for this synthesis highlighted the need for further work to be done in promoting Catholic Social Teaching and the call to action arising from our Catholic identity.



Some of the synod submissions presented to Bishop Denis at the Chrism Mass, April 11, 2022



Deepening a new habit of walking together

There is a trust that we are where God wants us to be; at the start of a journey, not the end. The people of our diocese have spoken and listened. Many named the 'Listening Lent' process as a good experience and want more of it. We have had an experience of synodality that needs to become a habit. In these first steps we have learned a lot about ourselves, and we are ready to discover/name that learning.

Part of the new habit of walking together is to remain open to the call and promptings of the Holy Spirit to build on the faith and good will of the people. This will necessarily call us to be attentive to the place of prayer, scripture, and discernment as well as the nourishment of the Eucharist as we continue to journey together and discover God's dream for each of us and all of us.

The listening showed us that as a people we are, to varying degrees, still questioning, broken, open and in a bit of a mess. Our starting point is far from perfection. But, in a spirit of synodality, we are being called to embrace the mess and trust in God. The Spirit is exhorting, inviting and pleading with us to move more deeply into the synodal process, so that we can heal and then embrace our relationship with God, with the Church and with one another.

We have opened a door to listening, to engaging with issues and people appreciated it. We have raised an expectation that we will continue on this journey and that the Diocese will be open to change.

Two co-existing images of Church emerged from the listening that were both powerful and challenging. That of a Church experienced by people as an institution with rigid rules and removed from the realities of people's lives and that of a local Church built on relationship which can often sustain people in their faith. People will often make a distinction between the two. As a synodal Church there is work to be done in learning to walk together as the People of God in communion with the whole Church. This is the start of a journey, and this is good.



Listening together to the voice of the Spirit in the life and diversity of people

It is clear that there is diversity of opinions and expectations among people in the Church. In discerning what God wants of the Church we need to continue to listen to one another in a spirit of mutual respect and care. Synodality has revealed the need to allow differences to emerge in ways that can lead us to grow together rather than to be divided. This is a challenging and difficult task that requires a freedom to let go of tightly held positions and to let God's Spirit direct us to where we are called to go.

Within the diocese and in our parishes, we need to continue to meet people and let their voice be heard. We need to create welcoming spaces that invite people to continue journeying together. Our parishes must become places where there are opportunities and mechanisms that facilitate people in listening and walking together locally. In creating spaces for prayer and learning, every effort should be made to make these multi and intergenerational experiences. Alongside this, the diversity of people's starting points and spiritualities will call for a variety of approaches.



The hope of this listening is not about drawing up plans; rather it is about practising and uncovering a new habit, a new way of being Church. Speaking with courage and boldness and listening with care and respect towards all voices is key.

- Julie Kavanagh

Diocese of Kildare & Leighlin



Paying attention to language, life experience and culture

The listening has clearly identified the need for a greater sensitivity to language and to our cultural context. This will surely need to influence how we engage and invite people to share in the life of the Church.

Coming to know Christ and our faith

What has emerged in the synodal process calls us to a 'back to basics' approach to faith formation across all ages. Many people mentioned the lack of adult faith formation and the need to help people to develop a personal relationship with Christ, in the midst of uncertainty and the fear of the unknown. There was a desire for a greater understanding of Scripture and basic teachings of faith. People expressed a wish that such exploration would take place in an atmosphere that encouraged questioning as well as learning and in accessible language. People want to understand their faith in a way that brings them to a deeper understanding of themselves and their life experience.

Greater participation of lay people in the life and governance of the Church

More conscious efforts must be made to put in place mechanisms at both universal and local church levels to enable a greater and authentic involvement of lay people in leadership and governance. This needs then to be accompanied by a strong invitation and



mandate for lay people to take up roles in the universal Church as well as in parishes and dioceses. This cannot just be lip-service or tokenism.

The role of women

The role of women, recognition of the ministry and charisms of women, and their access to ministry all need serious consideration for the Church in the modern world. This goes beyond pandering to cultural norms but rather is a call to listen to the Spirit in the signs of the times.

The experience of members of the LGBTQ+ community

The Church needs to further discern and reflect on the experience of those who identify as LGBTQ+ as members of the Church. Here again the difficulties and pain caused by language needs to be addressed.





Embedding a synodal way of being Church, accompanied by the Son and inspired by the Holy Spirit

As a synodal Church we journey with people of different life experiences, cultures and ethnic backgrounds and yet we are united in a common baptism and a call to discipleship. This process has shown that we need to commit to creating the on-going habit of walking together, listening to and learning from one another and the Holy Spirit. This commitment begins with local experiences where the Church lives. It points to the necessity of embedding a synodal way of being in the life of the diocese in order to energise and inspire people. This way of being Church will 'allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds and weave together relationships.' (Pope Francis)

As we present our diocesan synthesis, we note that we are in uncharted waters. But we are accompanied by the Lord just like the disciples on the road to Emmaus to a place of inclusivity and acceptance where the Church of God will flourish. This is a first step. We are called to be brave and courageous, and to go beyond our courage. The seriousness and honesty with which people engaged in this process must be met in kind on the part of the institutional Church in an authentic listening to and consultation of the People of God. For many members of the Church, especially those barely hanging on as members, this is seen as a last opportunity for the Church to listen and respond to what people of good will are saying for the growth of the Church.

The hard part is the next step of moving on and continuing the journey both locally and universally. We do so, journeying towards the Father, accompanied by the Son and inspired by the Holy Spirit.